

## **Students' Stories of Their Best and Poorest K-5 Teachers: A Mixed Data Analysis**

*John R. Slate*

*Sam Houston State University*

*Mary Margaret Capraro*

*Texas A&M University*

*Anthony J. Onwuegbuzie*

*Sam Houston State University*

### *Abstract*

*In this study, a multi-stage mixed analysis was used to examine stories from 72 undergraduate teacher education students regarding their best and poorest K-5 teachers, alongside responses to Likert-format survey items. Participants expressed strong agreement with items derived from the literature concerning characteristics of effective teachers (quantitative analysis phase). Themes from their stories were derived and exemplar stories of best and of poorest teachers are provided (qualitative analysis phase). Qualitative data were quantitized and statistically analyzed (quantitative analysis phase), revealing that five best K-5 teacher themes discriminated the students' ethnicity and six best K-5 teacher themes discriminated the students' major. Thus, this investigation provides a compelling example of the role that mixed analyses can play in identifying preservice teachers' perceptions.*

### **Introduction**

Successful teachers can have a powerful, long-lasting influence on their students. Teacher effectiveness has been found to have a greater effect on student achievement than any other teacher factor. Students assigned to several ineffective teachers in a row achieve significantly less than do those students assigned to highly effective teachers (Jordan, Weerasinghe, & Mendro,

1997). Sanders and Rivers (1996) identified some “very good” teachers and some “very poor” teachers and a wide range of teachers in between the two extremes. Cruickshank and Haefele (2001) described good teachers as being ideal, analytical, dutiful, competent, expert, reflective, satisfying, diversity-responsive, and respected. Other researchers (e.g., Cotton, 2000; Darling-Hammond, 2000; Nodings, 1992; Walberg & Waxman, 1983) have used the words: adaptable, firm, fair, flexible, creative, challenging, compassionate, trusting, confident, and caring in describing effective teachers.

These successful teachers tend to be those persons who possess a variety of teaching strategies rather than one rigid approach (Hamachek, 1969). Similarly, Doyle (1985) found that effective teachers match their teaching strategies to meet the needs of diverse learners and also to the demands of various standards, topics, and methods. Similar teachers were described by Curtin (2006) as using interactive teaching strategies. Further, Opdenakker and Van Damme (2006) revealed that effective classroom teachers make use of student-centered teaching strategies and behavior management skills.

Effective teachers care about their students and let their students know they care. Researchers have demonstrated the importance of this ethic of care in the perceptions that students have of a good teacher (Cotton, 2000; Good & Brophy, 2003; Minor, Onwuegbuzie, Witcher, & James, 2002; Nodings, 1992; Peart & Campbell, 1999; Witcher, Onwuegbuzie, & Minor, 2001). Beyond this ethic of care, students perceive teachers who treat them with fairness and respect as good teachers. These effective teachers demonstrate fairness with all genders, races, and ethnic groups. Researchers have indicated that students connect respect with fairness and want their teachers to treat them as people (Collinson, Kileavy, & Stephenson, 1999; McBer 2000; Thomas & Montgomery, 1998).

Motivation is another affective characteristic of a good teacher. Researchers (e.g., Bloom, 1984; Darling-Hammond, 2000; Wang, Haertel, & Walberg, 1993) have tried to investigate what constitutes this characteristic and have found that enthusiasm for subject matter, teaching, and learning are important components. Good teachers set high expectations while challenging, reinforcing, and encouraging students. In addition, these teachers encourage their students to be responsible for their own learning. Opdenakker and Van Damme (2006) found that teachers “with a high level of job satisfaction give more instructional support to their classes, especially to classes from a low-ability range, than teachers with a low level of job satisfaction” (p. 1).

Researchers in the area of teacher expectations have demonstrated that “the students in the bottom third of the class receive significantly lower expectations to achieve, and much less encouragement, from many teachers. Conversely, students in the top third of the class get the most teacher attention and encouragement” (Stronge, 2002, p. 37). Sometimes these lower expectations are communicated in very subtle verbal and nonverbal messages and result in a self-fulfilling prophecy (Tauber, 1997).

Researchers have examined various stakeholders’ perceptions of good teaching, generally these perceptions focus on the affective characteristics of teachers. These elusive characteristics, intangible aspects of teacher quality, account for 97% of the contributions that teachers make to student learning. The other 3% are derived from three measurable characteristics of experience, education level, and certification status that contribute to a teacher’s influence on students (Goldhaber, 2002).

To date, empirical research on preservice teachers’ perceptions about good and poor teaching has mainly focused on the generation of descriptive lists of characteristics. For example, researchers (e.g., Carson, 1999; Henry, 1977; Saban, 2003; Willie, 1985; Witcher et al., 2001) have examined preservice teachers’ perceptions of good and poor teachers with results limited to enumerating characteristics identified as effective and/or ineffective. In contrast, a few researchers reported conflicting views on how preservice teacher perceptions can be interpreted and used. Kagan (1992) reported:

The personal beliefs and images that preservice candidates bring to programs of teacher education usually remain inflexible. Candidates tend to use the information provided in coursework to confirm rather than correct their preexisting beliefs. Thus a candidate’s personal beliefs and images determine how much knowledge the candidate acquires from a preservice program and how it is interpreted (p. 154).

Contrastingly, Mills and Satterthwait (2000) found characteristics that preservice teachers valued as a student, and what they liked in their own teachers, changed as education courses proceeded. These preservice teachers later perceived their original views as naïve. Mills and Satterthwait (2000) concluded, “the knowledge about the teaching act which first-year education students bring to education faculties should be valued, and serve as an important standpoint from which other pedagogical knowledges can be viewed” (p. 29). Additionally, Rogers and Webb (1991), after conducting ethnographical interviews of preservice teachers, found that teacher education

programs needed to be revised to reflect an ethic of caring because it was “essential to the definition of effective teaching” (p. 173).

Willie (1985) called for researchers to continue having teachers share their experiences about good and poor teaching, contending that teachers need to assert themselves by assuming accountability for helping to characterize effective teaching. The “teacher experts” described one of the strongest themes of good teaching as trust that “connotes caring, concern, and compassion” (p. 23). Therefore, we contend that a similar line of research should be carried out with preservice teachers helping to define themes that schools of education should emphasize to assure production of effective teachers.

### ***Purpose of the Study***

As noted by Minor et al. (2002):

Knowing preservice teachers’ perceptions of effective teachers and teaching is a necessary precondition for identifying program experiences that require candidates to confront their own beliefs and to consider the appropriateness of those beliefs in the context of the research, promising practice, psychological theories, and philosophical beliefs that underpin professional goals and practice (p. 117).

Thus, the goal of this mixed methods study was to examine what characteristics preservice teachers perceive as being necessary to produce an effective elementary teacher. By describing their best and poorest K-5 teachers, descriptions were identified that describe preservice teachers’ perceptions of elementary teacher effectiveness. Specifically, the purpose of this study was threefold: (a) to identify characteristics that preservice teachers perceive in a K-5 teacher as representing their best teacher, (b) to identify characteristics that preservice teachers perceive in a K-5 teacher as representing their worst teacher; and (c) to examine the extent to which these two sets of characteristics are related to preservice teachers’ demographic variables (i.e., ethnicity, student major, first-generation college status).

### ***Research Questions***

The following research questions were addressed.

1. What are the perceived characteristics of K-5 teachers deemed by students to be their best K-5 teacher?
2. What are the perceived characteristics of K-5 teachers deemed by

- students to be their poorest K-5 teacher?
3. What are the similarities in these perceived characteristics of participants' best and poorest K-5 teachers?
  4. What are the dissimilarities in these perceived characteristics of participants' best and poorest K-5 teachers?
  5. What is the effect of participant ethnicity on perceived characteristics of the best K-5 teachers?
  6. What is the effect of participant ethnicity on perceived characteristics of the poorest K-5 teachers?
  7. What is the effect of first generation status on perceived characteristics of the best K-5 teachers?
  8. What is the effect of first generation status on perceived characteristics of the poorest K-5 teachers?
  9. What is the effect of student major on perceived characteristics of the best K-5 teachers?
  10. What is the effect of student major on perceived characteristics of the poorest K-5 teachers?

### ***Significance of the Study***

It was hoped that knowledge gained from this study would be helpful in better understanding the experiences students have in the K-5 educational system with good and poor teachers. This information could be used to add to the previous studies concerning the characteristics of effective and ineffective teachers, as perceived by persons interested in and/or practicing in the educational arena. In addition, it was expected that these research findings would extend the existing literature by obtaining more detailed information about the perceived characteristics of effective teaching, as well as on the less stellar examples.

## **Methods and Procedures**

### ***Participants***

Participants for this study were 72 female undergraduate students enrolled in courses at a major university in the Southwest. The majority of the students were Early Childhood majors ( $n = 60$ ; 83.3%), with almost all of the remaining students being in Bilingual Education ( $n = 11$ ; 15.3%). Most



participants were White ( $n = 55$ ; 76.4%), followed by Hispanic ( $n = 14$ ; 19.4%) as the next largest ethnic group. The average age of participants was 22.9 years ( $SD = 5.17$ ), with the youngest student being 20 years old and the oldest participant being 51 years of age.

The average grade point average (GPA) of respondents was 3.43 ( $SD = 0.33$ ), with the lowest GPA being 2.69 and the highest GPA being 4.00 on a 4.00-point scale. Regarding hours completed, students had completed an average of 119.35 semester hours ( $SD = 12.486$ ). When asked about whether they were the first person from their families to enroll in college, 23 (31.9%) students responded yes and 45 (62.5%) students indicated that they were not the first person from their families to attend college.

### ***Instrumentation***

The researchers employed the use of a survey comprising demographic questions, nine Likert-format items, and two open-ended questions. Participants were queried regarding their major, ethnicity, GPA, hours completed, first-generation status, and parental status. Next, two open-ended questions were presented in which students were asked the following: (a) Describe the BEST teacher you ever had while enrolled in grades K-5. What made this teacher the BEST for you? and (b) Describe the POOREST teacher you ever had while enrolled in grades K-5. What made this teacher the POOREST one you ever had?

The final part of the survey consisted of nine Likert-format questions wherein participants were asked to indicate their levels of agreement or disagreement with statements regarding characteristics of effective K-5 teachers. Five of the nine questions were positively phrased and four were negatively phrased. The four negatively phrased items were reverse-coded prior to data analysis (See Appendix A for a copy of the survey).

To determine the reliability of the Likert-format item responses, Cronbach's coefficient alpha was computed, yielding an estimate of .90 for the nine items, a value substantially higher than needed for research purposes (cf. Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994). All nine items had corrected item-correlations that were positive and ranged in value from a low of .33 to a high of .83. Thus, the internal consistency of participants' responses to these items was sufficiently high enough to be analyzed and interpreted.

## ***Procedures***

Students ( $n = 81$ ) in two early childhood, preservice methods classes were administered the survey at the end of class by a graduate assistant and were asked to complete it and return it the following week. All directions were written on the survey; therefore, no verbal directions were necessary. The following week, a box was placed in the back of the classroom for students to drop off their anonymously completed surveys. This process was strictly voluntary and 72 students returned the surveys for analysis, yielding a response rate of 88.9%.

A sequential mixed analysis (SMA) (Onwuegbuzie & Teddlie, 2003; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998) was undertaken to analyze students' responses. This analysis employed qualitative and quantitative data analytic techniques in a sequential manner, commencing with quantitative analyses, followed by qualitative analyses, and then followed by quantitative analyses that built upon the qualitative analyses. In implementing the SMA, the researchers incorporated five of the seven stages of Onwuegbuzie and Teddlie's (2003) mixed data analysis process, namely, data reduction, data display, data transformation, data correlation, and data integration.

## **Results**

Initially, frequencies of participants' responses to the nine Likert-format items on characteristics of effective teachers were calculated. Table 1 depicts the percentages of their responses to each item. Readers should note that in this table the negatively phrased items were not reverse-coded and instead reflect participants' responses to the question as phrased. For convenience of reporting, the categories of Strongly Agree and Agree have been collapsed into an Agreement category and Strongly Disagree and Disagree have been collapsed into a Disagreement category.

Statistical analyses were conducted to determine whether students' responses differed as a function of their major, their ethnicity, and whether they were a first generation college student. All analyses failed to yield any statistically significant differences,  $p > .05$ . Thus, student responses to the Likert-format items were similar, regardless of major, ethnicity, and whether they were a first-generation college student.

Table 1

*Participants' Responses in Percentages to Effective Teacher Items*

Effective K-5 Teachers are:	Agreement %age	Neutral %age	Disagreement %age
Experts in their subject areas	66.6	19.4	13.9
Enthusiastic about teaching	94.4	5.6	0.0
Do not know how to discipline students	2.8	6.9	90.3
Show concern for students	95.8	2.8	1.4
Do not respect students' ideas	1.4	4.2	94.4
Treat students fairly	86.1	11.1	2.8
Do not present materials in a clear and understandable manner	1.4	4.2	94.4
Use a variety of teaching strategies	95.8	1.4	2.8
Do not return students' work on time	7.0	4.2	88.8

**Best K-5 Teachers***Between-Case Analysis*

Student responses to the open-ended question concerning their best and poorest K-5 teachers were analyzed for emergent themes (i.e., method of constant comparison; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). This process involved reading and rereading participants' written responses. Consistencies were noted in individual words and phrases that were then coded into a SPSS database that already contained their demographic information and their responses to the nine Likert-format items. After determining that the maximum number of identified words and/or phrases for participants for their best K-5 teacher was 15 and for their poorest K-5 teacher was 11, 15 columns were created to record themes for the best K-5 teacher and 11 columns created for the poorest K-5 teacher. Codes for themes then were typed directly into the SPSS database for this study.

Once the themes had been identified and typed into SPSS, a frequency distribution was conducted for all of the best themes and for all of the poorest themes. This procedure permitted the researchers to identify the frequencies with which themes occurred. Because more than 70 individual words and/or



phrases had been identified, a decision was made that a theme was present when it occurred a minimum of 10 times. The cut-point of 10 was used because it represented an endorsement rate of 13.9%, which translated to an effect size index of .77 (using Cohen's [1988, pp. 180-183] non-linear arcsine transformation). That is, the endorsement rate of 10 was selected because it represented a large effect size (Cohen, 1988).

This procedure eliminated many words and/or phrases that occurred only a few times across the 72 participants. Through this process, a total of 14 dominant themes were identified for students' best K-5 teachers. These themes and the frequencies with which each occurred are shown in Table 2.

Table 2

*Participants' Themes for Their Best K-5 Teachers*

Theme	Present	Absent
Female Teacher Mentioned in Story	55	17
Caring	37	35
Good Attitude	31	41
Uses Different Modalities	30	42
Involving	26	46
Teaches Well	24	48
Passion Toward Job	19	53
Fun	17	55
Motivating	17	55
Creative	15	57
Builds Relationships	15	57
Respectful	12	60
Makes Learning Interesting	11	61
Classroom Management	10	62

For the first theme in Table 2, most of the participants mentioned that their best K-5 teacher was female. As most teachers in elementary settings are females, the presence of this theme is not surprising. *Caring* was noted as the second most frequent theme. Exemplars of responses that were coded under this category were: kind, compassion, nurturing, good intentions, wants to see students do well, and wants to see students succeed.

*Having a good attitude* was another frequently occurring theme in students' responses. Student responses that were coded under this label were: nice, enthusiastic, excited, sweet, good personality, and dynamic. *Uses different modalities* represented student words and/or phrases of: able to teach in and/or with different modalities, uses different activities, uses active learning, uses different environments, hands on activities, created another world to help students learn, worked in groups, learning through discussions, used reenactments, used journaling, and used experiments in class.

Another theme, *Involving*, was noted as being present when the following words and/or phrases were present in participants' responses: involved students, engaging, learning adventure, hands on, interactive, participated with students, interacted, and students had active role in learning. *Teaches well* was noted when students wrote: Taught well, taught student not just content, good teaching style, taught and instilled a love of learning, informative, good teaching skills, student learned, detailed in teaching lesson, assigned meaningful work, reviewed material well, provided information useful to student in their field, and provided good study skills. The next theme, *Having a passion for their job*, was evidenced by student comments of: passion, loves job, passionate, and conviction. The theme of *Fun* was noted by comments of: enjoyable, funny, humorous, exciting, and tried to make jokes.

The theme of *Motivating* was used to describe student responses of: gave praise, motivation, encouraging, inspiring, gave positive reinforcement, inspiring, gave student pride in self, and helped student believe in self. *Creative* was the term given to participant responses of creativity. *Builds relationships* was evidenced when students wrote: like friends, established relationship with student, learned about the student, interested in student, knows about student, knows about student's family, still remembers student to this day, spent time with student, provided one-on-one time with student, involved with student, shared own experiences with students, and approachable.

The theme of *Respectful* was used to describe student responses of: respect, respected students, and admired student. The next to last theme identified, *Makes Learning Interesting*, was evidenced by written responses of: made school interesting, interesting, and not boring. Finally, the last theme was that of *Classroom Management* which described: enforced rules, discipline, expected students and staff to follow rules, managed classroom well, good classroom management, and controlled class.

### ***Within-Case Analysis***

During the reading and rereading of participant responses, stories that provided rich detail about participants' best teachers were identified. Of these involved stories, ten student responses are provided in this study.

"The best teacher I had was in third grade. She strongly incorporated reading into everything we did. She also had a very structured way to monitor our behavior (a color chart). Her expectations were very clearly defined" (White Female, 22 years of age, Major: Bilingual Education).

"She would dress up and we would learn in new fun ways. We felt wanted and needed in our classroom. We thought we were playing or having fun when we were learning. Always positive. Everyone had a job" (White female, 21 years of age, Major: Early Childhood, first person in her family to go to college).

"The best teacher I ever had allowed the students time to learn on their own. She never yelled at them for being too loud. She had control over her classroom, not because they feared her, but because they respected her. She listened to the students' ideas. She was the best teacher to me because she was sweet and motherly, but the students still listened to her" (Hispanic female, 21 years of age, Major: Early Childhood, first person in her family to go to college).

"He encouraged his students to always do their best. He made learning fun and interesting. I think the best thing about him is that he showed genuine concern for his students. He was interested in us outside of school. I think this made us feel important and that we mattered" (Hispanic female, 23 years of age, Major: Bilingual Education; first person in her family to go to college).

"My best teacher was my third-grade Language Arts/Social Studies teacher. She was good because she was compassionate and caring. She made learning fun and enjoyable. Through her teaching I was able to go from a

struggling reader to a proficient reader” (White female, 22 years of age, Major: Early Childhood).

“The best teacher was loving, caring, and kind. She never yelled at us. She was very interesting and enthusiastic about teaching all subjects” (Hispanic female, 23 years of age, Major: Bilingual Education, first person in her family to go to college).

“My best teacher was my fifth-grade teacher. She loved what she did and made learning fun. She was very enthusiastic. She handled the difficult children in her class well. She respected us all and wanted to be a part of our lives. She wouldn’t allow other teachers to give her negative information about her students before she had them” (White female, 22 years of age, Major: Early Childhood).

“The best teacher I ever had helped me to believe in myself. She encouraged me to do the best and right for me. She was patient, loving, nice, intelligent, and wanted everyone to succeed in her class” (Hispanic female, 21 years of age, Major: Bilingual Education, first person in her family to go to college).

“My fourth-grade teacher. She had a zest for life and teaching. She always did hands on things that made us want to learn. The other outstanding element was that she integrated lots of arts and projects” (White female, 51 years of age, Major: Early Childhood, a parent).

“My second-grade teacher was amazing! She was always enthusiastic and made all of her students feel so special. I remember that I was going through an extremely hard time with my family. She became such a special friend to me through all of that. She made me feel like what I had to say was valued and made learning fun” (White female, 22 years of age, Major: Early Childhood).

## **Poorest K-5 Teachers**

### ***Between-Case Analysis***

The themes for the poorest K-5 teachers were determined in the same manner as the themes for the best K-5 teachers. Through this process, a total of 13 themes were identified for students’ poorest K-5 teachers. These themes and the frequencies with which each occurred are shown in Table 3.

Table 3

*Participants' Themes for Their Poorest K-5 Teachers*

Theme	Present	Absent
Female Teacher Mentioned in Story	40	32
Uncaring	18	54
Disrespectful	14	58
Poor Teaching	14	58
Did Not Use Different Modalities	13	59
Poor Classroom Management	13	58
Poor Attitude	12	60
Busy Work	12	60
Being Mean	11	61
Behaving Unprofessionally	11	61
Bias	11	61
Dull and Boring	11	61
Not Motivated	10	62

For the first theme in Table 3, most of the participants mentioned that their poorest K-5 teacher was female. As most teachers in elementary settings are females, the presence of this theme is not surprising. *Uncaring* was present in 18 student responses and was used to describe student responses of: did not care about student, did not care about student success, unwilling to help, uninterested in students, did not provide positive reinforcement, no compassion, and insensitive. Being *Disrespectful* was the theme that represented student comments of: rude, talked down to students, demeaning, made student feel dumb, made student feel stupid, embarrasses student, did not value student opinion, put down students, made bad comments about students, and made fun of students.

The next theme in terms of frequency of occurrence, *Poor Teaching*, described teachers who: wrote notes on board in no order, no instruction, no help with learning, doesn't keep student attention to learning, student graded not teacher, discourages learning, teacher reads word for word from book, did not follow textbook, assigns work students don't know how to do, not linear, poor curriculum, did not teach required text, tests on material other than what was taught, only assigned questions from book, could not work out the problems for students, had silly stories instead of teaching, sits at desk

the whole class, does not require work from students, cannot lecture well, and ineffective.

The theme, *Did Not Use Different Modalities*, represented participants' written responses of: did not use different modalities, used worksheets everyday, only used one modality when teaching, and used one way of teaching. *Poor Classroom Management* was the theme used to represent comments of: did not have a hold on class, did not get up from desk, class was wild, did not correct disruptive behavior, and chaotic classroom. *Poor Attitude* was noted as being present when students wrote: not a positive attitude, very negative, and grumpy. A label of *Busy Work* was used to describe student comments of: lots of work with no explanation, assignments seem to have little or no meaning, and work assigned and not collected. Another theme, *Being Mean*, was assigned for student responses of: mean, harsh, hard ass, made students miserable, took out things on students, mean to children, and hated student.

Several participants commented that their poorest K-5 teachers committed behaviors that we termed: *Behaving Unprofessionally*. This theme represented student comments of: unprofessional, teacher made fun of students, did not want to be a teacher, humiliated students and made children cry, students found a lot of students' work in trash can next day after turning work in, and talked bad about students to other teachers. The term, *Bias*, was used to reflect student written responses of: prejudice, prejudice against other races or ethnicities, discriminates, intolerance regarding ethnicity or race, says racial remarks, has lower expectations for certain ethnicities or races or students from other countries, not understanding of cultures not same as teacher, showed favoritism, and had favorite students.

The next to last theme present, *Dull and Boring*, described student comments of: boring, no energy, class went at slow pace, dull, hard for student to stay awake, uncaptivating, uninspiring, and not motivational. Finally, the last theme, *Not Motivated*, was the classification used when students wrote: not motivated to teach, only taught because had to, didn't care about teaching, didn't care about subject, in it for the paycheck, waiting to retire, burned out, and no passion.

### ***Within-Case Analysis***

Similar to the best teacher stories, during the reading and rereading of participant responses, stories that provided rich detail about participants'



poorest teachers were identified. Of these involved stories, 12 student responses are provided in this study.

“The poorest one I’ve ever had was the one I had when my teacher moved in fifth grade. We had a male who was strict and sometimes would peep in when we were changing clothes for P.E. I just don’t think that males are as nurturing as females in the younger grades” (White female, 23 years of age, Major: Early Childhood).

“The poorest teacher I had was in kindergarten. She was not a very good classroom manager. Another thing she lacked was patience for us, her students. Fortunately, this didn’t give me a bad impression of school” (Hispanic female, 23 years of age, Major: Bilingual Education; first person in her family to go to college).

“She was very disorganized, emotional and not very well groomed. She was a decent teacher, but I feel like she used too many worksheets and yelled at the students too much. Her methods of discipline were not consistent and the students were always on edge” (Hispanic female, 21 years of age, Major: Early Childhood, first person in her family to go to college).

“She was uncaring, disrespectful, and unenthusiastic. She also belittled her students and made them feel ignorant. Her teaching style was very strict and she rarely allowed students to be active learners. Students were always at their seats completing seat work” (White female, 21 years of age, Major: Early Childhood, first person in her family to go to college).

“My poorest teacher was my third-grade math teacher. She didn’t feel it was necessary to help me understand the curriculum until I failed every math test the first semester. My mom had to get involved so that I could get extra help from my teacher. I didn’t feel that my teacher cared that I learned the material” (White female, 21 years of age, Major: Early Childhood).

“She was very self-absorbed and mean. She yelled a lot and got a power trip. She was rude and we always did worksheets. She was not understanding and she sat at her desk a lot” (White female, 22 years of age, Major: Early Childhood).

“She had different, lower, expectations for Hispanic students” (Hispanic female, 21 years of age, Major: Early Childhood, first person in her family to go to college).

“My first-grade teacher was not so great. She didn’t really encourage us to succeed and sometimes made us feel unintelligent. One time we found a

bunch of our work in the trash can the next morning and, at the time, it was a big deal. Teachers should be more careful not to hurt feelings” (White female, 21 years of age, Major: Early Childhood, first person in her family to go to college).

“The poorest teacher I had was during my fifth-grade year. She was not able to control the students in her class and we always had behavior disruptions during her class. She was also not understanding of cultures that were not her own” (Hispanic female, 22 years of age, Major: Bilingual Education, first person in her family to go to college).

“She had only one way of teaching a concept and if you didn’t understand you were out of luck. She was always in a bad mood and everyone in the whole school called her the mean one and she lived up to her name. We never had fun or enjoyed learning in her class” (White female, 21 years of age, Major: Education, first person in her family to go to college).

“My poorest teacher was one who had us do worksheets a lot and she never seemed happy. Also, there seemed to be no passion for her students or their learning” (White female, 20 years of age, Major: Early Childhood).

“The poorest teacher I had was in second grade. She never was very approachable. Always unfriendly. She made learning a drudgery” (Hispanic female, 47 years of age, Major: Early Childhood, first person in her family to go to college, a parent).

### ***Analysis of Mixed Data***

Next, the quantitized qualitative data were analyzed to determine the extent to which, if any, that participants differed in their best and poorest K-5 teacher stories. Each participant’s qualitative themes were converted into either a 1 (theme present for that participant) or into a 0 (theme not present for that participant). Thus, each participant had a series of 1s and 0s for the 13 best themes and for the 14 poorest themes, yielding an inter-respondent matrix (Onwuegbuzie & Teddle, 2003).

To determine whether the endorsement of these dominant themes (dependent variables) differed as a function of the independent variables, namely, student ethnicity (Hispanic vs. White), whether or not participants were first generation college students, and student major (Early Childhood vs. Bilingual Education), a series of canonical discriminant analyses was conducted to determine the combination of best K-5 teacher themes and the

combination of poorest K-5 teacher themes that best discriminated each of the selected demographic variables (i.e., ethnicity, major, and first-generation status). Each of the demographic variables was examined separately. More specifically, an *all possible subsets* (APS) discriminant analysis was used to identify an optimal combination of best K-5 themes that best discriminated each of the levels of each demographic variables (e.g., Hispanic vs. Whites). All possible models involving some or all of the thematic variables were examined. Indeed, in APS discriminant analyses, separate discriminant functions are computed for all thematic variables singly, all possible pairs of thematic variables, all possible trios of thematic variables, and so forth, until the best subset of thematic variables is identified according to some criteria. For this study, the criteria used were Wilk's lambda, the probability level, the canonical correlation, the standardized canonical discriminant function coefficients, the structure coefficients, the odds ratio (primary effect-size measure). The APS discriminant analysis is different from *stepwise* discriminant analysis, in which the order of entry of variables is based solely on the probability level. In fact, stepwise discriminant analysis is not guaranteed to find the optimal model, and thus many statisticians do not recommend this type of analysis, preferring some form of canonical discriminant analysis (Onwuegbuzie & Daniel, 2003).

The first of six discriminant analyses (i.e., 3 demographic variables x 2 sets of themes) involved ethnicity as the grouping variable and the best K-5 teacher themes as the (potential) discriminating variables. The resulting discriminant function was statistically significant,  $\chi^2(5) = 18.24$ ,  $p < .01$ , accounted for 100.0% of the between-groups variance (canonical  $R = .50$ ;  $\Lambda = .75$ ), and constituted a large effect size. The group centroids were .30 for White students and -1.11 for Hispanic students, indicating that this function primarily discriminated White and Hispanic students. This discriminant function included the following five themes: Female Teacher Mentioned in Story (Standardized Coefficient = -0.60), Creative (Standardized Coefficient = 0.77), Respectful (Standardized Coefficient = 0.53), Makes Learning Interesting (Standardized Coefficient = -0.58), and Teaches Well (Standardized Coefficient = 0.67). An examination of the standardized coefficients indicated that, using a cutoff loading of 0.3 (Lambert & Durand, 1975), all five items made an important contribution to the canonical function, with the Creative theme making the largest contribution. The positive standardized coefficients indicate that White

students were more likely than were Hispanic students to endorse the Creative (7.1% vs. 23.6%; Odds Ratio [OR] = 4.12, 95% Confidence Interval [CI] = 0.49, 34.60), Respectful (7.1% vs. 18.2%; OR = 2.96, 95% CI = 0.35, 25.28), and Teaches Well (40.0% vs. 7.1%; OR = 8.27, 95% CI = 1.01, 67.98) themes; and were less likely to endorse the Female Teacher Mentioned in Story (85.7% vs. 75.5%; OR = 1.13, 95% CI = 0.88, 1.46) and Makes Learning Interesting (28.6% vs. 10.9%; OR = 1.38, 95% CI = 0.82, 2.32) themes. The odds ratios revealed that the Teaches Well theme had by far the greatest effect size, with White students being more than eight times more likely to endorse this theme than were Hispanic students. In contrast, for students' poorest K-5 teacher themes, the APS canonical discriminant analysis failed to yield a statistically significant set of themes that discriminated Hispanic and White participants in this study,  $p > .05$ .

Similar to the analyses above, an APS canonical discriminant analysis revealed that a selection of six participants' themes for their best K-5 teachers statistically significantly discriminated students' major,  $\chi^2(6) = 18.45, p < .01$ , accounted for 100.0% of the between-groups variance (canonical  $R = .50$ ;  $\Lambda = .75$ ), and constituted a large effect size. The group centroids were .25 for Early Childhood students and -1.31 for Bilingual Education students, indicating that this function primarily discriminated Early Childhood and Bilingual students. This discriminant function included the following six themes: Female Teacher Mentioned in Story (Standardized Coefficient = -0.34), Fun (Standardized Coefficient = 0.40), Passion Toward Job (Standardized Coefficient = 0.89), Makes Learning Interesting (Standardized Coefficient = -0.74), Uses Different Modalities (Standardized Coefficient = 0.46), and Teaches Well (Standardized Coefficient = 0.28). An examination of the standardized coefficients indicated that all seven items made an important contribution to the canonical function, with Passion Toward Job making by far the largest contribution, followed by Makes Learning Interesting. The positive standardized coefficients indicate that Early Childhood students were more likely than were Bilingual Education students to endorse the Fun (25.0% vs. 18.2%; OR = 1.42, 95% CI = 0.34, 5.93), Passion Toward Job (31.7% vs. 0.0%; OR = 1.27, 95% CI = 1.10, 1.45), Uses Different Modalities (45.0% vs. 27.3%; OR = 1.95, 95% CI = 0.56, 6.75), and Teaches Well (35.0% vs. 18.2%; OR = 2.16, 95% CI = 0.51, 9.19) themes; and were less likely to endorse the Female Teacher Mentioned in Story (77.6% vs. 81.8%; OR = 1.30, 95% CI = 0.25, 6.78) and Makes Learning Interesting

(11.7% vs. 36.4%; OR = 4.33, 95% CI = 1.01, 18.62) themes. The odds ratios revealed that the Makes Learning Interesting theme had by far the greatest effect size, with Bilingual Education students being more than four times more likely to endorse this theme than were Early Childhood students.

Contrastingly, for students' poorest K-5 teacher themes, the APS canonical discriminant analysis failed to yield a statistically significant set of themes that discriminated Bilingual Education and Early Childhood majors,  $p > .05$ . Similarly, the APA canonical discriminant analysis failed to yield a statistically significant set of best K-5 teacher themes that discriminated first generation and non-first generation students,  $p > .05$ . Nor did any set of poorest K-5 teacher themes emerge that discriminated first generation and non-first generation students,

Thus, in summary, no statistically significant difference in best K-5 teacher themes or poorest K-5 teacher themes was found between first generation and non-first generation students. Also, no set of poorest K-5 teacher themes discriminated the students by ethnicity or by major. However, five best K-5 teacher themes discriminated the students by ethnicity and six best K-5 teacher themes discriminated the students by major.

Following the APA canonical discriminant analyses, the number of themes participants had present in their stories were counted. That is, a total number of best themes was determined by adding the number of 1s that were present across the 13 best themes for each participant. Similarly, the total number of poorest themes was calculated by summing the number of 1s that were present across the 14 poorest themes. This analysis involved the rows of the inter-respondent matrix whereas the previous tables involved the columns of the inter-respondent matrix. The mean number of themes for participants' best K-5 teachers was 4.75 ( $SD = 2.34$ ) and the mean number of themes for participants' poorest K-5 teachers was 2.82 ( $SD = 1.96$ ). Then, the total number of themes across participants' best and poorest stories was calculated. The mean number of themes was 7.86 ( $SD = 3.57$ ). To determine whether participants differed in the number of themes they mentioned for their best teachers and for their poorest teachers, two analyses of variance (ANOVAs) were performed that each contained the three independent variables and their interactions. None of the independent variables or interactions were statistically significantly related to the number of themes pertaining either to their best or poorest K-5 teachers,  $p > .05$ . Because the dependent variable



data were now continuous in nature, and no longer dichotomous, parametric procedures such as ANOVAs are regarded as appropriate statistical techniques. The ANOVA, conducted between Hispanics and Whites, did not reveal a statistically significant difference in the number of themes written for their best K-5 teachers,  $F(1,65) = 1.653$ ,  $p = .203$ , effect size of 16%, nor in the number of themes written for their poorest K-5 teachers,  $F(1,67) = 1.338$ ,  $p = .251$ , effect size of 14%.

Similar analyses were conducted with the independent variable being whether or not the participant was a first generation college student. Statistically significant results were not present for themes about students' best K-5 teachers,  $F(1,64) = 0.419$ ,  $p = .520$ , effect size of 13%, nor about their poorest K-5 teachers,  $F(1,66) = 0.122$ ,  $p = .728$ , effect size of 4%. Similar analyses also were performed with the independent variable being student major. Statistically significant results were not present for themes about students' best K-5 teachers,  $F(1,67) = 1.142$ ,  $p = .289$ , effect size of 8%, nor about their poorest K-5 teachers,  $F(1,69) = 0.244$ ,  $p = .623$ , effect size of 6%.

## Discussion

Findings from this study are congruent with previous researchers. Themes of Respectful and Teaches Well are congruent with Cruickshank and Haefele's (2001) description of good teachers as being competent and respected. The themes of Caring and Creative agree with researchers (e.g., Cotton, 2000; Darling-Hammond, 2000; Nodings, 1992; Walberg & Waxman) who used creative and caring in describing effective teachers. As stated previously, effective teachers care about their students and show this caring to their students. Numerous researchers have demonstrated the importance of this ethic of care (Cotton, 2000; Good & Brophy, 2003; Nodings, 1992; Peart & Campbell, 1999). Moreover, students perceive teachers who treat them with fairness and respect as good teachers. Similar to the themes found in this study, students connect respect with fairness and want their teachers to treat them as people (Collinson et al., 1999; McBer 2000; Thomas & Montgomery, 1998).

Motivation, a theme present in this study, is another affective characteristic of a good teacher. Researchers (e.g., Bloom, 1984; Darling-Hammond, 2000;



Wang et al., 1993) have tried to investigate what constitutes this characteristic and have found that enthusiasm for subject matter, teaching, and learning are important components. Two directly related themes, Passion Toward the Job and Makes Learning Interesting, support effective teachers as being motivating. In this study, the theme of Uses Different Modalities agrees with Hamachek's (1969) statement that successful teachers tended to use a variety of teaching strategies rather than one rigid approach and with Doyle's (1985) more recent comment that effective teachers match their teaching strategies to meet the needs of diverse learners.

For this study, the theme of Involving Students was present, a theme that corresponds to Curtin (2006) who indicated that effective teachers use interactive teaching strategies. Involving Students directly relates, as well, to Opdenakker and Van Damme (2006), who revealed that effective classroom teachers make use of student-centered teaching strategies and behavior management skills. Thus, these themes identified in this study for students' best K-5 teachers are strongly congruent with the extant literature.

Furthermore, the findings that five best K-5 teacher themes discriminated the students' ethnicity and six best K-5 teacher themes discriminated the students' major suggest that students' stories of best and of poorest teachers should be interpreted in light of their demographic profile. Indeed, future research should examine other demographic characteristics that discriminate students' experiences of their best and poorest K-5 teachers. Potential variables that could be investigated include gender, age, GPA, level of student, number of offspring, and number of credit hours, because these variables have been found to predict college students' perceptions of characteristics of effective college instructors (Onwuegbuzie, Witcher, Collins, Filer, Wiedmaier, & Moore, 2007).

Knowledge gained from this study should be helpful in better understanding the experiences students have in the K-5 educational system with good and poor teachers. This information could be used to add to the previous studies concerning the characteristics of effective and ineffective teachers, as perceived by persons interested in and/or practicing in the educational arena. Moreover, as recommended by Minor et al. (2002), we believe that the current findings will "allow teacher education faculty and candidates to design experiences (e.g., readings, practica, case studies) that help candidates to develop conceptual models of effective teaching that will

guide their decision making once they assume responsibilities as practitioners” (p. 118).

A strong contribution that this study makes to the literature is its use of a multi-stage mixed analysis in which data were gathered in both qualitative and in quantitative form and in which data were analyzed sequentially. The final set of quantitative analyses was only possible after the qualitative data had been quantitized into an inter-respondent matrix. As such, readers are provided with a model by which qualitative and quantitative data can be gathered and fully integrated into analyses.

## References

- Bloom, B. S. (1984). The search for methods of group instruction as effective as one-to-one tutoring. *Educational Leadership*, 41, 4-17.
- Carson, B. H. (1999). Bad news in the service of good teaching: Students remember ineffective professors. *Journal on Excellence in College Teaching*, 10(1), 91-105.
- Cohen, J. (1988). *Statistical power analysis for the behavioral sciences* (2nd ed.). Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Cotton, K. (2000). *The schooling practices that matter most*. Portland, OR: Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory & Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.
- Collinson, V., Killeavy, M., & Stephenson, H. J. (1999). Exemplary teachers: Practicing an ethic of care in England, Ireland, and the United States. *Journal for a Just and Caring Education*, 5, 349-366.
- Cruikshank, D. R., & Haefele, D. (2001). Good teachers plural. *Educational Leadership*, 58(5), 36-30.
- Curtin, E. M. (2006). Lessons on effective teaching from middle school ESL students. *Middle School Journal*, 37, 38-45.
- Darling-Hammond, L. (2000). *Teacher quality and student achievement: A review of state policy evidence*. University of Washington: Center for the Study of Teaching and Policy.
- Doyle, W. (1985). Recent research on classroom management: Implications for teacher preparation. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 36(3), 31-35.
- Glaser, B. G., & Strauss, A. L. (1967). *The discovery of grounded theory: Strategies for qualitative research*. Chicago: Aldine.

- Goldhaber, D. (2002). The mystery of good teaching. *Education Next*. Retrieved July 6, 2007 from <http://www.educationnext.org/20021>
- Good, T. L., & Brophy, J. E. (2003). *Looking into classrooms* (9th ed.). New York: Allyn and Bacon.
- Hamachek, D. (1969). Characteristics of good teachers and implications for teacher education. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 50, 341-344.
- Henry, M. A. (1977). The impact of field experience on student's perceptions of good and poor teaching. *Teacher Educator*, 13(2), 18-22.
- Jordan, H., Weerasinghe, D., & Mendro, R. (1997). *The effects of teachers on longitudinal student achievement*. Presentation at the 1997 CREATE Annual Meeting, Indianapolis, Indiana.
- Kagan, D. M. (1992). Professional growth among preservice and beginning teachers. *Review of Educational Research*, 62, 129-169.
- Lambert, Z. V., & Durand, R. M. (1975). Some precautions in using canonical analysis. *Journal of Market Research*, XII, 468-475.
- McBer, H. (2000). *Research into teacher effectiveness: A model of teacher effectiveness* (Research Report #216). Nottingham, England: Department for education and Employment.
- Mills, M., & Satterthwait, D. (2000). The disciplining of pre-service teachers: Reflections on the teaching of reflective teaching. *Asia-Pacific Journal of Teacher Education*, 28(1), 29-38.
- Minor, L. C., Onwuegbuzie, A. J., Witcher, A. E., & James, T. L. (2002). Preservice teachers' educational beliefs and their perceptions of characteristics of effective teachers. *Journal of Educational Research*, 96, 116-127.
- Noddings, N. (1992). *The challenge of care in schools: An alternative approach to education*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Nunnally, J. C., & Bernstein, I. H. (1994). *Psychometric theory* (3rd ed.). New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Onwuegbuzie, A. J., & Daniel, L. G. (2003, February 12). Typology of analytical and interpretational errors in quantitative and qualitative educational research. *Current Issues in Education* [Online], 6(2). Retrieved July 7, 2007, <http://cie.ed.asu.edu/volume6/number2/>

- Onwuegbuzie, A. J., & Teddlie, C. (2003). A framework for analyzing data in mixed methods research. In A. Tashakkori & C. Teddlie (Eds.), *Handbook of mixed methods in social and behavioral research* (pp. 351-383). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Onwuegbuzie, A. J., Witcher, A. E., Collins, K. M. T., Filer, J. D., Wiedmaier, C. D., & Moore, C. W. (2007). Students' perceptions of characteristics of effective college teachers: A validity study of a teaching evaluation form using a mixed-methods analysis. *American Educational Research Journal*, 44, 113-160.
- Opdenakker, M., & Van Damme, J. (2006). Teacher characteristics and teaching styles as effectiveness enhancing factors of classroom practice. *Teaching & Teacher Education: An International Journal of Research and Studies*, 22, 1-21.
- Peart, N. A., & Campbell, F. A. (1999). At-risk student's perceptions of teacher effectiveness. *Journal for a Just and Caring Education*, 5(3), 269-284.
- Rogers, D., & Webb, J. (1991). The ethic of caring in teacher education. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 42, 173-181.
- Saban, A. (2003). A Turkish profile of prospective elementary teachers and their views of teaching. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 19, 829-846.
- Sanders, W. L., & Rivers, J. C. (1996). *Cumulative and residual effects of teachers on future student achievement*. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Value-Added Research and Assessment Center.
- Stronge, J. H. (2002). *Qualities of effective teachers*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.
- Tauber, R. (1997). *Self-fulfilling prophecy: A practical guide to its use in education*. Westport, CT: Praeger Greenwood.
- Tashakkori, A., & Teddlie, C. (1998). *Mixed methodology: Combining qualitative and quantitative approaches*. Applied Social Research Methods Series (Vol. 46). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Thomas, J. A., & Montgomery, P. (1998). On becoming a good teacher: Reflective practice with children's voices. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 49, 372-380.

- Walberg, H. J., & Waxman, H. C. (1983). Teaching, learning, and the management of instruction. In D. C. Smith (Ed). *Essential knowledge for beginning educators* (pp. 34-59). Washington, DC: American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education and ERIC Clearinghouse on Teacher Education.
- Wang, M., Haertel, G. D., & Walberg, H. (1993). What helps students learn? *Educational Leadership*, 51(1), 74-79.
- Willie, C. V., (1985). Good and bad teaching that adults remember: An essay on effective education. *Equity and Choice*, 1(3), 19-24, 32.
- Witcher, A. E., Onwuegbuzie, A. J., & Minor, L. (2001). Characteristics of effective teachers: Perceptions of preservice teachers. *Research in the Schools*, 8(2), 45-57.

1. Major: \_\_\_\_\_
2. Number of hours completed toward bachelor degree \_\_\_\_\_ Undergraduate GPA \_\_\_\_\_
3. Age \_\_\_\_\_
4. Race: Hispanic American \_\_, Caucasian \_\_, African American \_\_, Asian American \_\_,  
Native American \_\_, Other (Please specify) \_\_\_\_\_
5. Are you the first person in your family to go to college? Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_
6. If you are a parent, how many children do you have? \_\_\_\_\_

**For the following questions, please do not identify by name the identities of the persons you are asked to describe. We are not interested in knowing who they are. You may write your responses on the back of this page. Thanks again.**

7. Describe the BEST teacher you ever had while enrolled in grades K-5. What made this teacher the BEST for you?
8. Describe the POOREST teacher you ever had while enrolled in grades K-5. What made this teacher the POOREST one you ever had?



**Survey Questions:**

Please circle the number that best represents your degree of agreement, using the following scale:

1 = Strongly disagree

2 = Disagree

3 = Neutral

4 = Agree

5 = Strongly agree

**Note: Not all statements are positively presented. Be sure to read each statement carefully.**

	SD	D	N	A	SA
Effective K-5 teachers are experts in their subject areas.	1	2	3	4	5
Effective K-5 teachers are enthusiastic about teaching.	1	2	3	4	5
Effective K-5 teachers do <u>not</u> know how to discipline students.	1	2	3	4	5
Effective K-5 teachers show concern for students.	1	2	3	4	5
Effective K-5 teachers connect with students well.	1	2	3	4	5
Effective K-5 teachers do <u>not</u> respect students' ideas.	1	2	3	4	5
Effective K-5 teachers treat students fairly.	1	2	3	4	5
Effective K-5 teachers do <u>not</u> present materials in a clear and understandable manner.	1	2	3	4	5
Effective K-5 teachers use variety of teaching strategies.	1	2	3	4	5
Effective K-5 teachers do <u>not</u> return students' work on time.	1	2	3	4	5